

WASHINGTON – U.S. Congressman Allen Boyd (D-North Florida) today met with state and local tourism officials to discuss the economic impact the BP oil spill is having on Florida's tourism industry.

"Tourism is the lifeblood of Florida's economy, creating millions of jobs and infusing more than \$65 billion a year into our state. It is terrifying to think of both the short- and long-term damage the BP oil spill could have on one of our state's most important economic engines," said Congressman Boyd. "I understand people are scared, but I encourage all potential vacationers to call ahead and see what the real status of our beaches is before rushing to judgment and cancelling a trip. At the same time, I will continue fighting to ensure that BP is held accountable for the full cost of damages – both environmental and economical – so that our people can return to their way of life as quickly as possible."

At a briefing today organized by the U.S. Travel Association, tourism officials reiterated the widespread effects the oil spill is having on Florida lodging, restaurants, home prices and recreational activities. According to research commissioned by the Walton County Tourist Development Council, in May occupancy levels were down six percent; food and beverage revenue was down sixteen percent; and revenue from additional products and services sold was down thirty-two percent.

In addition, tourism officials said that an aggressive national marketing campaign will be needed in the years ahead to overcome the impacts of the oil spill and convince wary vacationers that Gulf coast beaches are clean, stable and ready for business.

"It's perception versus reality," Chris Thompson, President and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA said. "Right now, while it is true that none of our beaches are closed, this is a constantly evolving situation. The most important factor in keeping tourists coming to Florida will be conveying accurate and up-to-the-minute information. VISIT FLORIDA helps provide this information to visitors by displaying real-time information on our website and the current status of beaches statewide."

Congressman Boyd also met with tourism officials from Walton County to learn more about how small businesses along the coast are coping with the affects of the BP oil spill.

Today's meetings build on Congressman Boyd's commitment to protect North Florida from the effects of the BP oil spill and ensure that local communities are receiving economic relief as quickly as possible.

Last week, Congressman Boyd introduced legislation that would remove the tax liability from BP claim checks, ensuring that victims of the BP oil spill receive the full amount of damages without having to set aside an amount for their next tax return.

Earlier this month Congressman Boyd brought together representatives from federal and state emergency response agencies and key local stakeholders to discuss the effect a hurricane would have on the oil currently in the Gulf of Mexico and the impact it would have on North Florida's communities. The conference identified actions that need to be incorporated into current hurricane response plans in order to efficiently and effectively protect our communities and people from the threat posed by having oil propelled inland. Congressman Boyd plans to follow up with the appropriate agencies responsible for implementing these action items and deliver the recommendations and findings from the conference to the President.

He also sent a letter to the President calling for the establishment of a Gulf seafood safety task force to counter the growing public perception that seafood harvested in Gulf waters is not safe to eat.

Last month, Congressman Boyd sponsored legislation that would hold oil companies fully accountable for the economic damage caused by oil spills. Oil companies are already responsible for the full cost of environmental clean-up efforts. Boyd's legislation would raise the current cap from \$75 million to \$10 billion, ensuring that oil companies – and not the taxpayers – bear the cost for all economic damages resulting from oil spills.

More information on the BP oil spill crisis and a full account of Congressman Boyd's efforts to protect North Florida can be found at www.boyd.house.gov/oilspill .

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